

Pediatric Endocrinology Fact Sheet

Working with Your Child's School:

A Guide for Parents of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Students

The opportunity for your child to attend school as their true selves is exciting but may also raise concerns about the challenges they might face. Here are some ideas for working with your child's school to help create a welcoming and effective learning environment. Unfortunately, many youth face the challenges of bullying and victimization. You are your child's best advocate.

Establish a Partnership

Ongoing communication and collaboration between families and school staff are important. With greater acceptance and recognition of the gender diversity of youth today, most schools want to create school environments and learning conditions to effectively meet the gender needs of their students. A strong partnership between the student, family and educators helps everyone to work together to find the best solutions for your child. Even when disagreements arise, try your best to assume the school also wants effective solutions for your child and guard against allowing the relationship with school personnel to become adversarial.

Create a Gender Support Team (GST)

A Gender Support Team includes the child, parent and school staff who will work together to support your child at school. Depending on their age, comfort level and personality, your child may or may not be an active part of all team meetings. Your child needs to participate in the process of identifying what they need to feel safe and supported at school. The GST will be your go-to group when needs or questions come up about your child's experiences around gender. It's important as a parent to let them know that you are not looking for perfection, but that you do expect the team's commitment to working together in the best interests of your child.

Share Your Child's Story

Help the GST to learn about your child. Provide them with information about their gender journey and share information about who your child is—what they love to do and what they are good at. Sharing your child's preferred name and pronoun(s) is important. Consistently bringing the conversation back to your child's day-to-day experiences will help the group recognize how their decisions and actions impact your child's life in very real ways. The Gender Spectrum Website (<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>) offers helpful information for your child, your child's school, and you.

Create a Gender Support Plan (GSP)

No universal formula exists that is applicable to all non-binary or transgender children at school. Each child is an individual with individual wishes and goals. Nevertheless, there are many common topics that need to be considered and discussed for each child. The GSP offers a great way for doing so.

A GSP establishes a set of shared understandings about how YOUR child's gender will be supported. The GSP should be co-created by the Gender Support Team and used to guide the support of your child and capture key agreements. It may evolve over time as your child's needs and preferences change or emerge.

Your child should play a role in creating this plan. Most children, regardless of their age, have clear desires regarding how they would like to be supported at school. Topics that warrant discussion include your child's preferred name, restroom use, gym classes, and school team sports.

Be aware, however, that many transgender and non-binary students often feel things simply need to be "good enough." As a parent, you can empower them to expect respectful and fair treatment, and through the GSP help them and the school determine what that looks like. Once you have a GSP, set the date for a meeting where the team will review the plan for the next school year.

Write Everything Down

After any meetings or conversations with school personnel, always follow up in writing (email is fine) with details of shared agreements and next steps, points of disagreement or concerns, and/or any unanswered questions. Generally, administrators and teachers will appreciate your notes and they will help ensure that everyone has a shared understanding regarding agreements, next steps, to do's, etc. If, at some point, you and the school arrive at an impasse regarding support for your child, these written communications will be essential in any formal complaint processes or legal action you may pursue.

Plan Ahead & Do Your Homework

Planning for school starts well before the first day of school. Don't wait until the day before school starts to initiate communication with the school. Give the school the opportunity to thoughtfully prepare for your child's gender needs. Learn about different options the school can use to meet your child's gender needs. The school staff may not be well versed in these issues and may look to you for ideas.

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By showing examples of support other schools have utilized, it's more likely the school will accept your suggestions. Use other parents and online resources on the Gender Spectrum website and elsewhere for examples.

Know Your Rights

Unfortunately, sometimes the school will not meet its responsibilities to address your child's needs, including keeping them safe. While the approaches described above will likely lead to more positive outcomes, you may face resistance to your requests for support. You should be aware that in April 2014, the US Department of Education reaffirmed an earlier declaration that Title IX protection extended to transgender youth. This means that your child is entitled to a safe education appropriate for your child's individual needs.

However, some schools and teachers are unwilling to accommodate the needs of transgender or non-binary youth. In such cases, find out what specific legal protections are available in your state for transgender students at school. Look for state, school, or district policies that address gender diversity issues and identify the processes for filing complaints. You may need to contact the Department of Education in your state.

Connecting with state and national civil rights groups. In some instances, local parent support groups may be helpful. The Federal Office of Civil Rights might provide assistance. Transferring schools or taking legal action are additional strategies to consider.

Conclusion

The above ideas will help create the conditions possible for your child to attend school for its intended purpose: to learn. You will be partnering with the educators at this institution for several years. The importance of a good relationship goes beyond your child's needs related to gender. By taking the steps described here, hopefully you and the educators at the school will soon be spending more time discussing your child's math and writing skills than their gender!

For the resources listed above, as well more information about working with your child's school, please visit: <https://www.genderspectrum.org/resources/>.

This website offers specific pages devoted to parenting, education, mental health, legal needs, and social services.

In addition, www.welcomingschools.org is helpful resource.

PFLAG is another organization that may benefit your child and you. This organization (<https://www.pflag.org/>) founded by a parent to support her gay son promotes respect, dignity, and gender affirmation for all.

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